

THE
PRODIGAL.
A DRAMATIC PIECE.

AS PERFORMED AT
THE THEATRE-ROYAL,
IN THE HAY-MARKET,

DECEMBER 2, 1793.



“ To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
“ To raise the genius, and to mend the heart,
“ To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
“ Live o’er each scene, and be what they behold:
“ For this the Tragic Muse first trod the stage,
“ Commanding tears to stream thro’ every age.”

Pope's *Prologue* to Addison's *CATO*.

LONDON:
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AND SOLD BY B. CROSBY, STATIONERS COURT.

1794.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE dinner-hour of persons of fashion having almost jostled the supper-hour of our ancestors out of its place, the first act of a play is either very thinly attended, or considerably interrupted by the clattering of box-doors and seats, while the house is filling; for which reason it has been thought necessary, of late years, at the Hay-Market Theatre, to perform a short piece previous to that which is meant as the principal attraction: those already upon the acting list having been some time in use, Mr. Colman (then junior) desired me to point out such as might occur, suitable to the purpose. I mentioned *The Fatal Extravagance*, written by Joseph Mitchell; (*Vide BIOGRAPHIA DRAMATICA*, 1782, V. II. P. 119.) which, on looking over it, he was pleased to approve of; excepting that he thought the catastrophe too tragick for a petite-piece. I, therefore, made such alterations in it as he conceived to be wanting; in doing which, I availed myself of his very judicious advice, and adopted several energetick expressions,

dropt, during the rehearsals, from his mouth & pen.

The concluding lines,

" Hence may the Gamester learn, ere yet too late," &c.

are entirely Mr. Colman's.

I wish I could particularize every word suggested by him; for tho' I have not, as Ben. Jonson, to our loss, too-scrupulously did (as it is supposed) by Shakspeare, "*rather chosen to put weaker (and no doubt lesse pleasing) of mine own,*" yet would I not "*defraud so happy a Genius of his right, by my lothed usurpation.*" See Jonson's Address "*To the Readers.*" prefixed to the 4to edit. of his "*Sejanus.*" 1605.

The piece, as altered and called *The Prodigal*, has been excellently performed twelve times at Mr. Colman's Theatre, with distinguished approbation; some of the passages, now printed, were omitted in the representation: but, what would have been thought tedious and heavy on the stage, it is hoped will not be found so in the closet.

October, 1. 1794.

F. G. WALDRON.

DRAMATIS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

BELLMOUR,	Mr. Barrymore.
COURTNEY,	Mr. Aickin.
BARGRAVE,	Mr. Benson.
LOUISA,	Mrs. Powell.

SCENE, Bellmour's House.

TIME, that of the Representation.

THE AMERICAN

Mr. T. W. Higginson

Mr. A. A. Phelps

Mr. H. C. Adams

Mr. J. W. Foster

THE AMERICAN

THE AMERICAN

THE
P R O D I G A L.
A DRAMATIC PIECE.

A C T I.

SCENE.

A Saloon.

Enter LOUISA and COURTNEY.

LOUISA.

'T WAS kind! this speed of your return.—But,
tell me,
What success had you? was my father mov'd?
Methinks I read your news in your sad visage,
And my heart trembles with prophetic fears.

COURTNEY.

'Twas as I judg'd 't would be—His own wants
press him;
He sinks beneath your husband's wasteful life;
Those boundless dicings, and voluptuous riots,
Which have at once dissolv'd a wealth so vast,
That Pity scarce vouchsafes to heed his sufferings.

B

LOUISA.

THE PRODIGAL.

LOUISA.

But his late conduct proves my Bellmour chang'd;
Misfortunes have instructed him to think,
And thought has captiv'd every madding passion.

COURTNEY.

Yet early vice, by custom long indulg'd,
Leaves such impression of habitual ill,
As finds no cure, but from severe remorse,
And Time's slow working.

LOUISA.

Nay, name not Bellmour's vice;—
He has no vice;—his every power is lost,
Even had he taste for follies:—poor and despis'd,
The slaves, for whose curs'd sakes he stands re-
proach'd,
Now shun his converse. Villains, who betray'd,
Start when they meet him. Poverty, like his,
Spreads a contagion round it, and mankind
Fly frighted from him. What will become of us?
Did you lay open our incumbent ruin?
Urg'd you my father strongly? Want's cold hand
Creeps o'er us, and 'tis now no time for counsel.

COURTNEY.

I told him all, and mov'd his utmost pity.
Still, as he set to view your husband's failings,
I urg'd his virtues, and bore down the balance;
I prais'd his wit, his courage, his humanity,
His fine frank spirit, and his generous nature:
He answer'd, and I firmly think with truth,
What he has done, already, weighs him down;
His struggling will to save you has undone him,
And Bellmour's self would there beg aid in vain.

LOUISA.

THE PRODIGAL.

3

LOUISA.

O ! he was never born to be a beggar !
 Heav'n is too kind to goodness, to forsake him !
 He, whom soft Pity melts at others' misery,
 Deserves, himself, to live exempt from woe.
 Bellmour could ne'er behold a stranger wretched,
 But he partook his pain, 'till he could ease it.
 How, then, will he support the weeping anguish
 Of three poor children, all undone by him !

COURTNEY.

His good, and ill, so chequer out his nature,
 That, which excels is doubtful. Nobly will'd,
 His pitying heart flows out in generous purposes ;
 But, wanting power to stem the tide of pleasure,
 Irresolute he drives, and floats to ruin.
 Men must be rigid, and severe, in virtue !
 Serious and noble aims distinguish reason !
 To live for luxury is not to live.
 The man of pleasure dreams away his days,
 And dies, to be forgotten. Bellmour's soul,
 Had contemplation bent it to a bias,
 Had given a point to Fame's proud pinnacle,
 And purpled o'er his name with deathless glory !
 Now, it lies lost in dust !—contemn'd, despis'd !

LOUISA.

Oh ! I shall tremble to behold his face !—
 His ruin'd family hangs on his heart ;
 His helpless children's future fate distracts him ;
 For, the once-lively Bellmour smiles no more !
 Silent he walks, or stands, with folded arms ;
 And still looks down, as if his soul were earth.
 If e'er, by chance, his lifted eyes meet mine,
 The starting tears glare dreadfully upon me,
 And, quivering, struggle to flow loose in sorrow.
 Then sighs, suppress'd by force, strive hard for
 vent.

B 2

And

THE PRODIGAL.

And heave, and swell, like earthquakes in his
bosom.

Groaning, at length, he breaks in whirlwind from
me;

Torn by ten thousand pangs, raves, reddens, starts,
And frights me with a dreadful burst of passions!

COURTNEY.

Poor, suffering innocent! I would 'twere mine
To screen you from the storm that's gath'ring
round;

But I, unblest'd with power, can only wish,
And hope some chance will save you from de-
struction.

LOUISA.

O, uncle! what remains for Hope to snatch at?
Of all the wide estate, that late was ours,
But this poor house is left us;—this, too, totters.
Soon, Ruin, with his palsied hand, will seize
This ancient pile, and shake it into dust!
Not thrice the worth of all that now is ours
Will save poor Woodly from that fatal bond,
He sign'd to save my Bellmour.—All our hope
Was in your friendly journey to my father;
Woodly must sink, and Bellmour cannot bear it.
Bellmour will never live to sink a friend!—
Look yonder, where, in pensive grief, he walks
Unhoping, and disconsolate!

COURTNEY.

Poor Bellmour!

How chang'd, from that wild, gay, joyful reveller,
Which all his friends have known him! still ex-
treme.

Enter

THE PRODIGAL.

5

Enter BELLMOUR, melancholy.

LOUISA.

My life!—my Bellmour!—wound not thus my soul;
I have more woes to bear, that are my own,
Than my strength matches; add not, thou, thy
 forrow:
That would o'erwhelm me quite.

BELLMOUR.

 I pray, forgive me!
Prison'd in thought, I could not look about me;
And my soul miss'd thy comfort:—I was con-
 sidering—

LOUISA.

What sad reflection held you?

BELLMOUR.

 Which of my boys,
Some few years hence, when I'm dissolv'd in death,
Will act the beggar best!—run, bare-foot, fastest!
And, with most dexterous shrug, play tricks for
 charity!

LOUISA.

O! for heav'n's sake, forbear, by starts like this,
To image horrors, Nature shrinks at thought of.

BELLMOUR.

Why, my Louisa! 'tis a wretch's duty
To learn to bear his misery;—to know it,
To use ourselves to scorn it, is the way
To make it easy to us.—Yet, I'm to blame!
Thou had'st no share in any guilt of mine;
I ought alone to suffer.—'Twas too cruel,
'Twas ev'n unmanly, to afflict thy innocence!

COURTNEY.

6 THE PRODIGAL.

COURTNEY.

Oh, Sir! you sooth the grief you shou'd resist!
Mean spirits, only, buckle under woe;
It is the great man's pride to combat fortune,
And rise against oppression.

BELLMOUR.

Sir, 'tis true;—
And I remember you have oft advis'd it,
While I had power to try my virtue's proof.
A man may die unhelp'd, but must not hope
To conquer without arms.—Talking of help,
Will your good Brother aid me?—Speaking silence!
How could I hope it from him?

COURTNEY.

Yet, despair not.
A time may come when ev'n your woes shall prove,
To suffer well's the noblest way to conquest.
On a smooth Sea the Sailor shews no skill,
But he displays it all in Hurricanes,

BELLMOUR,

He would not, sure, neglect to save his daughter,
Had he the power still left him! yet, friends, some-
times,
Are more than fathers!—I had a friend in
Woodly!
Once he was happy;—what he shall be hereafter,
He owes to thriftless Bellmour. Perish the name!
To what a stinging death is he reserv'd,
Who leaves a good man wretched, whom he made
so!
Sir, it would ease me of a galling pain,
Would you dispel this unavailing hope.
I cherish'd late, relying on my father,

From

THE PRODIGAL.

7

From Woodly's breast;—'Twere sin to nourish it;
Since 'tis unstable:—he must know it soon.
Let it be told by any tongue but Bellmour's.

COURTNEY.

I'll visit him this instant.—Do you, meanwhile,
[To Louisa.

Calmly seek comfort from a firm belief
That heav'n befriends your virtues, and will save
you. [Exit.

BELLMOUR.

Louisa! [With violent emotion.

LOUISA.

Alas! what mean you to distract me thus,
With your wild startings?

BELLMOUR.

Nay, but mark me well,—
Want's the damnation of a living sinner!
What have I liv'd for, if I die a beggar?
How excellent art thou not to have scorn'd me!
Good heav'n! that season should give madness way,
'Till man finds musick in a rattling dice-box!
And has contracted thrice three thousand Acres,
To the curs'd compass of a narrow table!
With what a thoughtless rapture have I shook 'em!
Hung o'er the throw! and hurl'd out my posterity-
Slaves, thieves, or beggars!—Tear me limb from
limb,
Some pitying torturer! To die at once
Were comfort, ev'n in agony!—but I shall be
Whole ages, after death, in dying!—Villains,
Dull, pitiless, insulting, purse-proud villains,
Will point at some poor, ragged child of mine,
And say, "There's pride and name, there's Bell-
mour's honour!"

"There's

8 THE PRODIGAL.

"There's the blest remnant of a boasted family!"
Curse the keen thought! it pours all hell upon me!

LOUISA.

Still wilt thou, thus, snatch at Despair's wild
shadows?

I've heard the manly soul can smile at anguish:
Woman's weak mind may bend beneath adversity;
But, Bellmour's brow, methinks, should wear a
Majesty,
And make affliction awful.

BELLMOUR.

Away with Counsel.

I cannot hear thee! thy moving air, thy wisdom,
That lovely softness, which bewitches round thee!
Each charm, which has a thousand times ap-
peas'd me,

Now makes me mad! like oil, pour'd out on flame,
I tower in blaze, and burn with tenfold fierceness!
Thy every word is death! each look thou giv'st me
Shoots poison'd arrows thro' my bleeding con-
science!

Think'st thou I am so mean, so lost a wretch,
That my own misery stings me? cruel woman!
What earthly ill can Bellmour stoop to fear,
Which hurts but Bellmour? 'tis true, indeed, thy
fate

I have not learn'd to bear!—there, Grief unmans
me;

Thine, and thy helpless Infants' woes, rise to me;—
Oh! I have wrong'd thee!

LOUISA.

'Tis wronging me to say it.

Re-enter

THE PRODIGAL.

9

Re-enter COURTNEY.

BELLMOUR.

Return'd so soon!

LOUISA.

Why look you pale, good Uncle?

COURTNEY.

To bring unwelcome tidings to the wretched,
Gives the sad teller half the hearer's woe.

BELLMOUR.

Friendly preparative! what follows next
Can be but Woodly's ruin!

COURTNEY.

He's undone!—

LOUISA.

Unhappy Bellmour!

COURTNEY.

Near your house I met him,
Hemm'd by a swarthy guard of licens'd villains;
The Law's grim blood-hounds, with rapacious
talons:
Who dragg'd him on, in merciless serenity,
To shut him from his hopes, in joyless prison!

BELLMOUR.

Oh!

COURTNEY.

At short distance, near the Sycamore,
That marks the turning to that now-fall'n house
C Of

THE PRODIGAL.

Of this poor Gentleman, I saw his Wife,
 Wild, with a storm of grief! her Babes amaz'd!
 Struggling, with weeping Servants, to break free.
 Fain wou'd she follow him, to share his prison;
 With straining eyes, she kept him long in view;
 And, when a gushing flood obscur'd her sight,
 Still more to lengthen out a last, sad look,
 She wip'd away the-tears, and gaz'd again!

LOUISA.

Dreadful description!—close it here, good Uncle!
 It cuts too deep, and wounds my Bellmour's soul.

COURTNEY.

Yet more remains to tell; his spacious house
 Is fill'd with Ruffians, his rich goods torn down,
 His frantic Wife, and Children, roam unshelter'd,
 Without a home to succour them!

LOUISA.

O, guide them hither!
 Let me, with open arms, fly to receive them;—
 And strive, if possible, to give them comfort.

BELLMOUR.

Louisa!—as thou wou'd'st preserve my life,
 Bring not their grief too near me;—
 To see it would distract me!—said he nothing?

COURTNEY.

Marking me, as I turn'd my face aside,
 He call'd, and counsell'd you to save yourself
 By sudden flight; since other Ruffians, brought
 By Bargrave, your malicious creditor,
 Will presently be here, on the same purpose.
 As for my fate, said he, bid him not mourn it:
 To fall for Bellmour, would have given me joy,
 Had Bellmour's self not fall'n.

BELLMOUR.

THE PRODIGAL.

11

BELLMOUR.

He falls indeed!

COURTNEY.

Now, as I enter'd, Bargrave, just arriv'd
With his infernal crew, besets your gates.

LOUISA.

Now, Bellmour, thou art lost!—immediate ruin
Will swallow thee, and me, and our dear children!
All! all must sink together!—teach us, good
Uncle!
Which way to fly; what measures to pursue.

COURTNEY.

The doors, fast barr'd, are guarded by your Ser-
vants;
And you may thro' the grove escape unseen.

BELLMOUR.

No! let him enter! This Bargrave taught me vice,
And counsell'd each excess that has undone me!
He wrongs the Devil, who makes himself the
punisher
Of ills which he excited! Justice acts wisely!
Oh, she's not blind!—she chuses a fit moment,
And throws him on my vengeance! Let him enter;
Perdition seize me, if he 'scape my hand!

LOUISA.

As thou lov'st me, Bellmour! be not rash.
Should'st thou add murder——

COURTNEY.

Persuade him rather;
Sooth him to pity. Would he free your friend,
C 2 And

And grant some weeks of liberty, for trial
What succour may be found; you've many
friends—

BELLMOUR.

No, Courtney! friendship rises but with fortune;
And sets when men go downward. Yet, I thank
you;
Rage had obscur'd my reason. Say to Bar-
grave,
I have an offer for his private ear.
I will instruct my swelling indignation,
To cool and settle, like a Courtier's passions.
What cannot interest teach us!

COURTNEY.

Tho' I loath,
As the dark adder, this detested wretch,
I'll try to speak him fair. [Exit,

BELLMOUR.

Leave me, Louisa!
I would not have thee wound thy innocent eyes
With sight of such a Monster.—Nor brook I well
That thou, who hast been taught to love sincerity,
Should'st hear me flatter infamy!

LOUISA.

Do but think
'Tis for their sakes, whom most you wish to suc-
cour,
And you will find it easy. Farewell! he comes.
My Bellmour! as thou lov'st me, oh, be careful!
[Exit.

Enter

Enter BARGRAVE.

BARGRAVE.

So, Sir! I find you make your house your Gar-
rison!

Bold, four-faced centinels admit, with caution,
Whom you vouchsafe your pass to.—'Tis great
indeed!

Girt, Sovereign-like, within your Palace walls,
The Laws must beg admission! But, the pride,
With which your state o'erlook'd me, will instruct
me,

'Till I find means to reach you.—

BELLMOUR.

I sent not for you
Thus to revive old hatred. 'Twas my meaning,
To set before your eyes the spreading misery,
From which a week's short respite may, perhaps,
Free Woodly, and myself, nor do you wrong.

BARGRAVE.

Oh, Sir!—no doubt; 'tis likely that seven days
Will pay a Bond, which twice seven months, and
more,

Have drawn no interest for!—Woodly may claim
Some little pity.—He's a suffering tool,
Who fasts to feed your riots. But, for you,
No plea bears influence. What a mass of wealth
Loaded your youth! the toil of careful Ancestors!
And how it is consum'd, let thousands tell,
Whose lifted eyes and hands proclaim their won-
der:

I dare not whisper it.—Men would think me mad;
And

And laugh to hear, that the once-liberal Bellmour
Is grown a niggard, now; and like a Miser,
Whines for a day of Grace,—and cries, 'twill ruin
him
To pay his Creditors.

BELLMOUR.

Insulting wretch!
It grates my inmost soul to suffer this,
But my friend's fate depends on't. [*Aside.*] You
seem'd to speak
As if you pitied Woodly.—Give him liberty;
And let me fill the place to which you have sent
him:
I ask no more.—For my own miseries,
Perhaps, they merit not,—I'm sure they scorn
What pity thou can'st give them.

BARGRAVE.

Pity to thee!
Who, not content to ruin thus thyself,
Hast beggar'd all, whom blood, or foolish friend-
ship,
Attracted to thy vortex of destruction!
So ends our talk;—I'll hear no more, Sir!

BELLMOUR.

Nay, then,
Off, mean Hypocrisy! I'll make thee hear me,
In words which match thy malice.—Think, low
Traitor!
From whom I learn'd that guilt, with which, but
now,
Thy tongue reproach'd me! who, but the villain,
Bargrave?

BARGRAVE.

BARGRAVE.

Ha! villain! said you?— [Offering to draw.

BELLMOUR.

Yes, the villain, Bargrave.—
 Touch not thy sword!—Should'st thou unsheath it
 here,
 Thy guardian Devil, too weak to save his Minister,
 Should rise in vain between us!

BARGRAVE,

I'll hear thee out.—

BELLMOUR.

Who, but thyself, spread all those snares about me,
 Which first entangled, then o'erthrew my virtue?
 Who stain'd the native whiteness of my soul,
 And spotted it with follies?—Think how the Bond,
 Most fraudulently, and by shameful arts,
 Was from my clouded reason won! when fumes
 Of maddening wine had warm'd my yielding
 fancy,
 Fit for a knave's impression!—Hast thou hu-
 manity?
 And dost not feel a ruin thou hast caus'd?
 Hast thou reflection?—and can'st thou sleep un-
 slung?
 Or, have the fiends, that haunt thy gloomy bosom,
 Encased thy heart with steel? fear'd up thy con-
 science?
 And left all Devil within thee?—

BARGRAVE.

Now, take breath;
 And hear me tell the effect of this fine preaching.
 I find

I find myself, with all these black endowments,
Your master, and your scourge!—But that I scorn
thee,

I could be angry.—Mark this silent witness.
Look on this Bond, and curse the woeful hour
That gave thy friend and thee to my disposal;
While I seek vengeance, not from words but
action. *[Attempts to go out.]*

BELLMOUR.

By action did'st thou say? I thank thee, Bargrave!
Thou hast instructed me.—That fatal Bond
Shall never rise in Judgment against Woodly.

*[Drawing his sword, and putting himself
before the door; — Bargrave hastily
putting up the bond to defend himself,
drops it unperceived.]*

Just Heaven, that hates oppression, points a way
To ease my wretchedness of half it's load,
By cutting thro' that chain that binds my friend.
Now, if thou dar'st defend thy villainies,
Unsheathe thy sword, and to this guarded door
Force thy wish'd passage thro' the breast of Bell-
mour. *[They fight and Bargrave falls.]*

Enter COURTNEY and LOUISA.

COURTNEY.

What have you done? I fear'd this rash effect
Of rage but half suppress'd.

LOUISA.

Was this my Bellmour? speak! was this the way
To ease our wretchedness?—Oh! this black chance
Sinks us still deeper, cuts us off from comfort,
And we can never, now, be happy more!

BELLMOUR.

BELLMOUR.

Courtney!—'twere vain to wish this act undone.

[Takes up the bond.]

Secret and sudden, like his guardian angel,
Let me entreat thee to convey this parchment
Into my Woodly's hand.—Say how it happen'd:
Tell him, whatever Fate may do with me,
I'm blest'd to give him freedom.

COURTNEY.

Collect yourself!—

Guard the doors well.—There's danger near:
I will not leave you long.— [Exit.]

LOUISA.

Hence, Bellmour, fly!

One hour's delay prevents escape for ever.

BELLMOUR.

What would'st thou have me do?

LOUISA.

Let me disguise thee.—

Then, thro' the Grove haste; and, in some poor
Cottage,

Intreat a short concealment. There I'll find thee,
And we'll consult relief from all our woes.

BELLMOUR.

Fix'd as my fate I stand, unmov'd, t' expect it.
Seek thy own safety; I'll not stir, by Heaven!

LOUISA.

Think how my peace of mind, my hope, my
misery,

Depend on thine.—Thus, on my knees, I urge it.

Thou, being free, may'st find a thousand ways

To succour us; but, if thou fall'st, a Family,—

A lost! a friendless Family! falls with thee.

D

Oh!

Oh! if I ever were belov'd by Bellmour,
 If all my prayers, my vows, my tears, can move
 him,
 Let him but grant me this;—let him but leave
 me:
 Rain then a world of woes upon my head!
 Let want, reproach, contempt, and all Life's
 agonies,
 In ceaseless bitterness of soul, afflict me;
 While thou art safe, if I but heave one sigh,
 One breath of discontent escape my lips,
 Curse me thyself, and make me lost indeed!

BELLMOUR.

Excellent woman!—rise.—To see thee thus
 Is torture beyond bearing!

LOUISA.

I'll not leave thee!—
 Here, at thy feet thus, humbled as that dust,
 Which I shall shortly be when I have lost thee,
 Here will I grow for ever, 'till thou grant'st
 This only prayer I make thee.

BELLMOUR.

Thou bid'st me fly:
 What would'st thou I should fly from?

LOUISA.

Danger and misery.

BELLMOUR.

With whom then must I leave that misery?
 Must not thyself, and those three friendless
 wretches;
 Whose being I was cause of, and who expect
 Aid and protection from a Parent's hand;
 While I escape, must you not all be left?

Hell

THE PRODIGAL.

19

Hell glows in that hot thought! be left, expos'd
To all the miseries, which thou would'st have
me
Fly, like a Coward from, and leave for inno-
cents,
Who owe 'em to my baseness! no, Louisa!

LOUISA. [*Rising.*]

Lost, lost, for ever!

BELLMOUR.

No, there's a Judge on high,
Who sees thy goodness, and will sure preserve
thee;
Come what Fate lists to me!—But, lov'd Louisa!
Give now my sorrows way; a solitary thought
Will teach me to resolve for life, or wish'd-for
death! [*Exit.*]

LOUISA.

Angels assist! inspire thy silent reasonings!
And from this labyrinth of woes conduct thee!
Dreadful our prospect!—yet, all may be well!
Heav'n cannot err!—oft' guides us in the dark;—
And, when we least expect, affords relief! [*Exit.*]

End of Act the First.

A C T II.

SCENE.

*A Gallery.**Enter BELLMOUR (pensive.)*

BELLMOUR.

WHY should I pause? nothing can be a crime
Which puts a stop to evil. A thousand
men

May have been poor as I,—and yet liv'd happy!
Miseries we make ourselves, are borne with ease;
But he who beggars his posterity,
Begets a race to curse him!—every scorn,
Which wrings the soul of any future Bellmour,
Whom want shall pinch the bones of, ages hence,
Will mark, with shame, my unforgotten grave,
And reach my guilty soul, where e'er it wanders!
If to give misery to those, to whom
We once gave life, is an inhuman crime,
How can it be a sin to take life back,
And put an end to undeserved woe?
Oh!—did I feel no misery but my own,
How easy were it for this Sword to free me
From all that anguish, which embitters life?
But, when the Grave has given my sorrows rest,
Where shall my Wife and tender Babes find com-
fort?

Not all the virtues of Louisa's mind,
Nor e'en my pretty Prattlers' innocence,
Will shield them from unpitied Want's bleak
storm!

Better

Better, a thousand times, to lead them with me
 Unto the peaceful mansion of cold death !
 It shall be done ! — but how ? that asks some
 thought.—

From those dear, destin'd breasts, the pointed
 steel

Must draw no blood, to stain my blushing hand ;
 Lest my soul start, and that seem cruelty,
 Which I wou'd fain think pity.*—Hark ! Time
 presses. [** Loud knocking without.*]

What if I use th' unwounding aid of Poison ?
 I have at hand a sovereign remedy
 For all diseases, want, and woe, can plague with ;
 'Twill blunt the edge of death, and, in sweet
 slumber,
 Swim, soft and shadowy, o'er the misty eye-ball.

Enter LOUISA.

LOUISA.

Will you forgive me, if officious love,
 That anxious pain I feel till you are safe,
 Obtrude my zeal, perhaps a few short moments,
 Before you would have wish'd to be disturb'd ?
 Yon Villains grow impatient for admission,
 And scarce your Servants guard the gates against
 them ;

Storms of bold oaths, and horrid imprecations,
 Mix'd with loud thunderings, and the threats of
 Law,

Make my heart tremble, and have forc'd me hither :
 Forc'd me to urge you, by all ties of love,
 Of interest, honour, hope, and future blifs,
 To fly this dangerous roof, and save us all.

BELLMOUR.

I thank thy gentle care.—It is resolv'd. [*Aside.*]
 I have bethought me of the means to evade

The

The malice of my fortune.—'Twill be a journey,
A little longer than thy love could wish it;
Yet, not so far but we shall meet again.

LOUISA.

Oh! be the distance wide as Pole from Pole,
Let me but follow thee, and I am blest.

BELLMOUR.

It shall be so, Louisa.

LOUISA.

A thousand Angels
Spread their wings o'er thee, and protect thy steps.
Now thou art kind!—But, the dear little ones,
Shall they go too?

BELLMOUR.

All! all shall go!

LOUISA.

Haste, then;
Let us begone: my bounding heart leaps joyful,
And I shall smile again.—But, ah me, Bellmour!
They are so young! so tender! is it possible
That they should travel with us?

BELLMOUR.

Moving innocence!
My strong heart bleeds within me at her accents.
A few short steps will lodge us in a place [*Aside.* *To her.*
Of rest and safety.—We shall have leisure there
To weigh our future hopes, and seek fit means
To our wish'd end.—Courtney will soon return;
Said he not so?

LOUISA.

He did, and we'll inform him
Of

Of our new purpose, and begin our flight.
 I'll make provision, such as best befits
 Our haste, and our distresses.— [Going.

BELLMOUR.

Stay, Louisa!

Those precious cordials, I so lately purchas'd,
 Gave I to thee, or no?

LOUISA.

You spoke of such,
 But still forgot to give them to me; now
 They're not worth memory.

BELLMOUR.

Nay, now most useful!
 Their virtue is reported sovereign,
 Against the body's toil, or mind's disturbance.

LOUISA.

I would my Uncle were return'd to counsel us!
 What can so long detain him? sure he's safe!

BELLMOUR.

Seek him, my love! whilst I the cordials find.
 Now, King of Terrors! to prepare thy banquet! (*aside.*) [Exit.

LOUISA.

Oh, what a world of ruin has one vice,
 Detested gaming! brought upon us all!
 Bellmour, so honest, tender, mild, by nature;
 Has that propensity made almost wicked!
 Stripp'd of the means to satisfy just claims,
 His harrow'd heart starts not at homicide;
 And may destroy himself, his babes, and me!
 All-gracious Heav'n! how will these mis'ries end?
 I dare not hope! but thou art all-sufficient!

If

If more of evil yet o'er-hang this roof,
O, for my children's sake, just God! avert it!

[Exit.]

Re-enter BELLMOUR.

BELLMOUR.

My baleful hand has mix'd the deadly draught!
To give it as a cordial—Give it! whom?
Start from thy burning orb, thou conscious Sun,
And chill thyself to ice at my black purpose.
Am I a Parent? a Protector! Lover!
Or has this Devil, that heaves about my heart,
Transform'd me to a fiend?—he has! he has!
Chain him, some angel, millions of fathoms, down;
Heap him with mountains, lest he rise again,
And in a husband's, and a father's breast,
Brew horrid murders!—I am myself once more.—
Now let cool Reason's undistracted search
Answer my bleeding soul, which dreadful ill
May best be borne by Nature? To leave our friends
To grinding sorrow, poverty, and scorn,
With sense of *his* not feeling *any* pain,
Who gave *them* all;—or, to quit life together,
And, wanting power to bless, make it some merit,
Not to leave curses to surviving innocence!
I'm mad again! Reason herself betrays me,
And whispers, that this last is tenderest,
And murder grows a mercy.—

Re-enter LOUISA.

LOUISA.

Found you the cordial?
Your little wanderers are ready dress'd
To act the pilgrim with us; perhaps 'twill aid
Their fainting spirits, yet untried in hardships:
Haste, love! and let's be gone.

BELL.

BELLMOUR.
 Oh! if one moment,
 One short thought longer, she oppresses me thus,
 With melting, innocent talk, I shall grow soft,
 Yield her to want, and live to be a beggar.

LOUISA.
 Still you are doubtful—

BELLMOUR.
 No, I'm fix'd—Oh! Nature! [*Aside.*
 I left my closet open;—on a table,
 In that gold cup, which was thy father's present,
 On the last birth-day of our eldest boy,
 Thou'rt find the cordial.—I have tried 'em all,
 And what seem'd fittest for the boys and thee,
 Waits, in that cup, thy tasting.

LOUISA.
 Courtney stays long.—
 All things are ready, and I wish him here.
 Now for this boasted cordial.— [*Exit.*

BELLMOUR.
 Be firm, my heart!
 Stop thy big beat! thaw! thaw this curdling blood,
 That thro' my icy veins creeps cold as death,
 And freezes in its passage!—Where is Louisa?
 But a few moments, and she is no more!
 Now! now the unsuspecting innocent
 Lifts that last cup;—Now! now she tastes a
 draught,
 That snatches her for ever from my sight,
 And robs me of all comfort! Never more
 Shall her sweet voice enchant me! Never more
 Shall her soft eyes look fondly into mine,
 And shine with swimming languor!
 Open, engulf me, and conceal my shame,
 E Befriending

Befriending Earth!—or, from thy yawning depth
Stream up a petrifying blast, to blot out memory,
Congeal my blood, and fix me here a statue!

LOUISA (*without.*)

My life! my Bellmour!

BELLMOUR.

Ha! 'tis her voice that calls me.
It founded not reproachful.

LOUISA (*without.*)

Look, my Bellmour!
These little strugglers will not quit the cordial,
But sip it to the bottom.

BELLMOUR.

Torturing horror!

Enter LOUISA, with an empty cup.

LOUISA.

Why did'st not come, my Bellmour! and partake,
When twice I call'd you? 'Twould have been a
scene
Of pleasure, to observe with how much eagerness
The little wranglers quarrell'd for the cup;
Which, having drunk of first, I brought to them,
I bid them taste it only; and told the prattlers
It was their father's present: but that word
Transported them to lift their pretty hands,
In love and duty; and to drain each drop.

BELLMOUR.

Furies tear me!—

LOUISA,

LOUISA.

Have I done aught amiss?
Did you not give permission they should taste it,
Ere they began the journey?

BELLMOUR.

Alas! Louisa!
A long, long journey is, indeed, begun;
But endless as eternity!—Thyself,
And those dear infants, are—poison'd by that cor-
dial!

LOUISA.

Poison'd, by thee! Thou say'st it but to try me!
If 'twere thy wish that I should die, thy love,
At least thy pity, would have giv'n some warning.
Death is a dreadful journey, and requires
Much length of preparation.

BELLMOUR.

By those charms,
Which I no more must gaze on, and be blest'd,
Thou can'st not live an hour!—a last, long sleep
Will steal, in cold advances, o'er thy beauties;
And those two beamy suns, whose rays dart thro'
me,
Shall set in endless night!—Ev'n while we talk,
Th' eternal shade will rise at once between us,
And sever us for ever!

LOUISA.

Dreadful contraction
Of that short span, which, at its longest stretch,
Was much too narrow to allow me scope,
To speak, or look, or think my love for thee!
What shall I say? a thousand tender thoughts
Struggle, at once, for vent.—I cannot speak—
Death is too hasty!—I have yet undone,

E 2

Unspoke,

Unspoke, unthought, a thousand weighty things!
 O, heaven! my little ones!—let me fly to them!
 Have I so short a time to gaze upon them,
 Yet ne'er must see them more! I cannot leave thee!
 What shall I do?—O, bring my children hither;
 Fly with them to my arms!—Dear, dying innocents!

O, Bellmour! Bellmour! why has this been done?

BELLMOUR.

That we might baffle woe, here die together,
 And leave no beggars of our race behind us!
 See! my Louisa! I have a faithful guide,

[Draws a dagger.]

That will not let me lose thee.

[Attempts to stab himself.]

Enter COURTNEY.

COURTNEY.

Hold thy rash hand!

[Wrestling the dagger from him.]

Nor to thy other crimes add Suicide!
 He, thou thought'st slain by thy revengeful arm,
 Accursed Bargrave! is borne hence alive,
 But slightly wounded; tho' awhile he seem'd,
 Through craft or cowardice, bereft of life.

BELLMOUR.

Has that dire villain 'scap'd! and shall my wife,
 And tender innocents, O, God! be made
 A sacrifice for all my load of guilt!

COURTNEY.

Nor are your wife and children sacrificed.
 The hand of Heaven (howe'er, from mortal eyes
 Obscur'd in clouds, it seems severe) is merciful!
 Not thy three children, and thy wife, are fallen;
 Nor shalt ev'n thou, whose meditated crimes
 Deserve a signal vengeance, now be punish'd!

LOUISA.

LOUISA.

What mean you, Sir?

BELLMOUR.

Thou little know'st, alas! the certain means
I us'd for their destruction!

COURTNEY.

Then, trembling, mark the mazy paths of Providence!

Fearing, from late events, some dire mishap,
I trac'd your footsteps, as you sadly rang'd
The lonely Gallery; spied a late-fill'd Cup
Of deadly poison, (known by the vessel left,
Which had contain'd it) mingled with a rich
draught,

For present use: I took it, secret, thence;
Refill'd the Cup with Cordials that remain'd,
Without the baneful mixture; stood conceal'd
To view what then might hap: Louisa came,
And snatch'd it thence; I follow'd her, unmark'd,
O'erjoy'd to have been the means to intercept
Her and her children's death.

LOUISA.

Merciful Heaven!

[Louisa and Bellmour kneel, in adoration
of, and gratitude to Heaven; then embrace
their Uncle, and each other.]

BELLMOUR.

Angels surround thee, with unceasing vigilance;
[To Courtney.]
And, for this friendship, ward off every evil!
Oh! I have err'd! but, henceforth, I am chang'd!

COURTNEY.

THE PRODIGAL.

COURTNEY.

Now hear the rest; and Heav'n pronounce thee
worthy of't!

By a young Kinsman, landed from a Ship,
That left her Consort scarce a day behind,
Woodly has heard, tho' mournful, happy news,
Your absent Brother, many years thought dead,
Returning, rich, from the remotest East,
Died but in sight of land; and has bequeath'd
His whole heap'd wealth to thee.

BELLMOUR.

All-gracious Providence!
Most humbly I adore thee; and will trust,
Implicitly, to thy unerring wisdom!
Thou best can'st clear thy mystic dispensations,
And make confusion end in beauteous order!

Hence may the Gamester learn, ere yet too late,
To shun that Vice which endless Ills await;
Wild as the Sea his maddening passions flow—
Himself, Wife, Children, beggar'd at a throw!
Oh, should a Father, or a Husband come,
Whom Dice have lured from happiness and home,
To listen to our Tale; our hope is, here,
To check one Gamester in his mad Career.



THE END.

